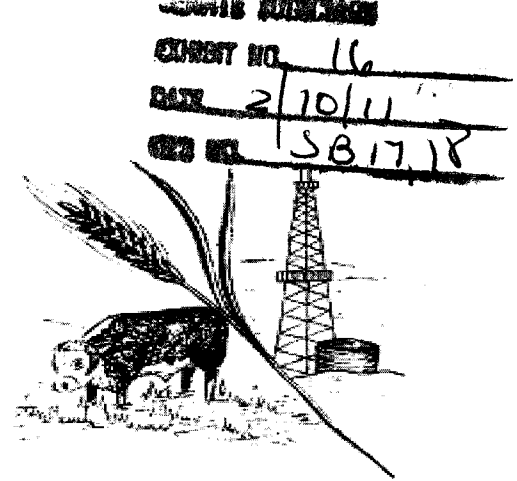


# PONDERA COUNTY

20 4<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE S.W.

CONRAD, MONTANA 59425



February 9, 2011

Chairman Murphy, members of the committee, for the record, we are the Pondera County Board of Commissioners: Joseph Christiaens, Sandra Broesder and Cynthia Johnson. We urge you to NOT pass SB 17 and SB 18.

Pondera County does not operate a detention center other than the County Jail. Commissioners are ultimately responsible for maintaining the physical plant, jail inspections, the fiscal soundness, and the safety and welfare of detainees. Commissioners, as representatives of the County also bear the full responsibility in the event something goes wrong. None of these things change with SB 17 and 18. These two bills essentially give full autonomy to an elected Sheriff or an elected or appointed Chief of Police and release them of any accountability, responsibility, or liability.

These bills would be incredibly detrimental to all local government relationships. Pondera County currently enjoys an open and fully participatory relationship between all elected officials, including the Sheriff. The Sheriff's department already has the authority to hire their own staff and courteously includes one member of the County Commission in all interviews. The Commissioners have a place at the table but not in the final decision; we appreciate that opportunity.

These bills will increase the cost of doing business at the local level because of the additional level of Risk Management which would be required to cover the liability of a department that has no oversight, functioning in a relative vacuum, free from responsibility to the taxpayers. We're not sure we would even be able to find insurance coverage for a Sheriff's Department in the event SB 17 & 18 were somehow successful.

For these reasons and many more which defy logic, we urge you DO NOT PASS SB 17 & 18. Let's work together to Restore the Partnership among all levels of Government, instead of destroying critical partnerships.

Sincerely,  
Pondera County Commissioners

Cynthia A. Johnson, Chair

Joseph Christiaens, Vice-Chair

Sandra J. Broesder